

April 9, 2025

Testimony in Support:

LD 1166 “An Act to Change the Professional Title and Identification of Physician Assistants to Physician Associates”

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee: we are Stephanie Podolski and Jessica Cysner, residents of Brunswick. We both practice medicine at MaineGeneral Health. We are submitting testimony in support of LD 1166, “An Act to Change the Professional Title and Identification of Physician Assistants to Physician Associates. ”

The PA profession was established in the 1960s in response to increasing public health needs and an ongoing physician shortage after World War II. Fast forward more than 60 years, and we face a similar physician shortage, particularly in rural areas, with an estimated deficit of over 80,000 physicians in the U.S. by 2035. Twenty percent of people in the U.S. reside in rural areas, yet only eleven percent of physicians provide healthcare services in federally designated rural communities. More than fifteen percent of practicing PAs deliver high-quality, patient-centered primary care services in these rural communities.

We have both been practicing clinicians in Maine for many years and have served on the front lines during the COVID-19 pandemic. We continue to fill the gaps in care amidst ongoing healthcare staffing shortages and have served our patients well. Maine faces a significant health literacy issue, with many patients struggling to read their medication labels or understand the treatment plans for their diagnoses. Health literacy is a social determinant of health and is a stronger predictor of health than age, income, employment, or other factors. It evaluates an individual’s ability to understand and utilize health information and services to make informed choices about their health. Additionally, health literacy encompasses how the healthcare system meets patients where they are in their understanding.

The PA name change bill before you addresses a public health need. The majority of patients are confused by the term “ assistant, “ which hinders their understanding of the PA’s role within the healthcare system. Changing the PA professional title back to “physician associate” will help alleviate significant confusion surrounding our title, allowing patients to distinguish PAs from other health professions, such as medical assistants.

PAs are well positioned to be the healthcare leaders who remind the U.S. that delivery and expansion of high-quality patient care remains one of the top priorities for many decades. The PA profession has always been prepared to serve and will continue to be the solution to many public health dilemmas moving forward.

Thank you very much for your consideration in advance.

Stephanie Podolski, MPH, MSPA, PA-C, CAQ-HM
Director, Hospitalist APP Fellowship MaineGeneral Health
Lead APP Adult Hospitalist Team, MaineGeneral Health
Adjunct Faculty, UNE PA Program

Jessica Cysner, MSPA, PA-C
Urgent Care PA, MaineGeneral Health
Adjunct Faculty, UNE PA Program